

'But it's going to take time'

New affirmative action Chief seeks change

By ANN PORTAL
Of the Emerald

Women and minorities shouldn't be guaranteed jobs — they just should be guaranteed equal access, according to the affirmative action office's new assistant compliance officer.

"We advocate the most qualified person to get the job," says Leon Jordan. "I think this institution will be surprised how many qualified minorities and women are out there."

Jordan knows about obtaining qualifications. A third year law student at the University, he began his college education at Oregon State University as a 6-foot-3 guard on the basketball team.

After becoming a first-line reserve with a chance to move up, Jordan says he decided he didn't want to become a professional basketball player, an "athletics prostitute" living for the chance to play pro ball.

Jordan dropped the sport and changed his goal to attending law school. Switching from business to liberal arts, he joined the debate and public speech teams, placed third in a regional speech tournament, raised his grade point average from 2.3 to 3.8, won the presidency of the Black Student Union and worked as a part-time minority recruiter for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Jordan's improved academic record gained him admission to three law schools besides the University's, including Columbia and Cornell, but he says he decided to keep himself, his wife and young son in Oregon.

"Wherever I go, I eventually want to come back to the state of Oregon," he says.

The only law student to apply for the affirmative action position — the other applicants all were doctoral students — Jordan says he feels his law background, management experience gained at

American Telephone & Telegraph in Portland and an internship with Eugene attorney Kendrick Mercer helped him to get the job.

Jordan takes on an important position that he admits is "very political." As assistant compliance officer, he is responsible for ensuring that all job searches, notifications and hirings are done in a fair, non-discriminatory manner.

The difficulty of the 20-hour-per-week job is compounded by the fact that the percentage of women appointed to full-time academic positions last year declined — compared to the previous year — as did the percentage of minority appointments in both full-time and part-time positions at all ranks, according to the University's 1981 affirmative action report.

Jordan says he thinks the number of women and minorities employed on campus is very low. However, he says he feels the affirmative action office is well suited to preventing discriminatory practices, such as the "old buddy" system of hiring colleagues and friends without adequately notifying others of the job opening.

Another method for getting around affirmative action requirements — tailoring job requirements to a specific candidate — usually can be spotted by reviewing position announcements before they are advertised, he says.

At the University, the affirmative action office assumes that employers who discriminate do so because they don't know the right procedure or applicable law, Jordan says, adding that the office legally can do little more than "slap hands" when procedures aren't followed. However, Jordan says that "other recourses can be taken," although he declined to identify those recourses.

The key affirmative action problem is one of equal access, Jordan says. Many minorities and women just don't know the jobs are available. Once notified, they should compete for jobs based on their qualifications.

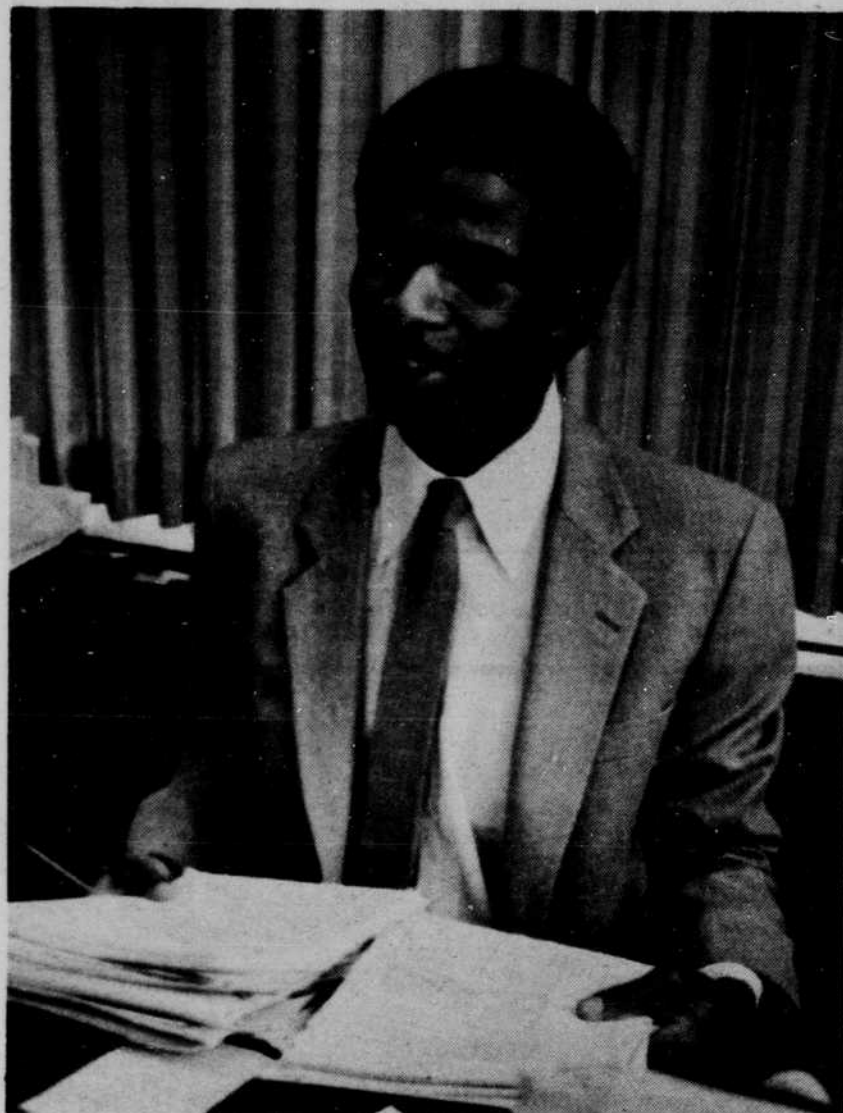


Photo by David Corey

Leon Jordan, the new assistant compliance officer for affirmative action, feels fortunate to have been hired.

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